

Harvard Journal of World Affairs

A Public Policy Forum of the John F. Kennedy School of Government

MANHATTAN PROJECT II

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HARVARD JOURNAL OF WORLD AFFAIRS
John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 John F. Kennedy Street

SUMMER 1992

to McGeorge Bundy is to his article, "To Cap the Volcano," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 1, October, 1969, p. 10.

¹³*Washington Post*, Sunday, February 2: "New Era of Nuclear Disarmament," Don Oberdorfer and R. Jeffrey Smith, p. A26.

INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY

Manhattan Project II: To End the Threat of Nuclear War

by Daniel Ellsberg

The era of nuclear threats should end with the Cold War. But that is not what is happening today. One phase of the nuclear age—the period of superpower arms race and confrontation—has come to a close, but another phase may be about to accelerate: the era of nuclear proliferation.

With the ending of hostility between NATO and the late Warsaw Pact, the danger of any crisis erupting into all-out global nuclear war has diminished drastically. But that very fact could reduce inhibitions against making or carrying out threats of nuclear attack in regional conflicts. The possible phase of new proliferation may actually increase the likelihood of limited nuclear wars, accidents, and nuclear terrorism.

All those possibilities will loom for a considerable period within and on the borders of the former Soviet Union, despite the recent unprecedented pledges of three of the four nuclear republics in what is now the Commonwealth of Independent States to denuclearize themselves in coming years. It will take time and dedicated effort to lay to rest what Secretary of State Baker described as "Yugoslavia with nukes." And the threat is even more plausible of nuclear materials, weapons or expertise metastasizing outward into the camp of emerging, unstable nuclear states or terrorists, insurgents, or criminal gangs.

In 1990, a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir was narrowly averted, and little has happened to reduce the prospect of a recurrence.¹ Worldwide, although the risk of nuclear

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any state, as well as for achieving commitments on the part of all nuclear states of the world to:

- The principles of no-first-use of nuclear weapons and their practical restriction to the single function of deterring nuclear attack;
- Abolition of tactical nuclear weapons, with total dismantlement of them by the year 2000;
- Near-abolition of strategic weapons by the year 2000: 95 percent or more reduction from present superpower levels, down to 500 warheads at most and preferably less than 100 in any nuclear state;
- Along with all other nations, adherence to a strengthened anti-proliferation regime and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including, at last, its disarmament aims, as stated in both its preamble and Article VI.

Accompanying the commitments to nuclear policy goals, major programmatic efforts should already be underway by 1995 toward their realization by the third target date.

By 2000: Achieving these goals by the end of the decade will substantially end the era of nuclear threats with the millennium.

¹*Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1992: "Terrifying Pursuit of Nuclear Arms," John M. Broder and Stanley Meisler. "Just how close the world came to its first nuclear war that spring has been one of the best-kept secrets in Washington. Officials believe that it was only the timely intervention by the United States, and parallel entreaties from Moscow, Beijing and several European governments, that prevented all-out war involving nearly a fifth of the world's population."

²See the title and subtitle of an otherwise excellent article by William M. Arkin, Damian Durrant, and Hans Kristensen in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, December, 1991: "Nuclear Weapons Headed for the Trash: Whether he intended it or not, Bush has taken the steps that mean the beginning of the end for nuclear weapons." The authors could on to say that these steps "practically guarantee" the "end of the nuclear age."

³For an appreciation and critique of these unprecedented initiatives and responses, see "Nuclear Security and the Soviet Collapse," interview of Daniel Ellsberg by Jerry Sanders and Richard Caplan, *World Policy Journal*, Winter 1991-92. Several passages in this paper are drawn from that interview, and others are elaborated there.

⁴See in particular: "The Future of the U.S.-Soviet Nuclear Relationship," Committee on International Security and Arms Control, National Academy of

be dealt with cooperatively by humanity as a whole, led by the countries which are themselves the greatest contributors to the problem.

The technical and policy issues addressed by current proposals are still framed by the desire to deploy or store weapons in excess of these minimal levels until time to make use of them, and by such questions as how to retarget them meaningfully after losing their superpower enemy. We must shift our focus to irreversibly disabling them and guarding them safely until they can be dismantled. Planning should begin now to safeguard the radioactive residues indefinitely under international supervision.

Only if those of us in the United States act decisively and consistently on such a reconceptualization can we ask any other countries to forego nuclear weapons altogether, ask other nuclear states to restrain their buildup or use of threats, or expect effective international collaboration on enforcement. We cannot hope for any of these so long as we continue to test new nuclear warheads, insist on our freedom to initiate nuclear warfare, and maintain grossly excessive arsenals.

Policy change on each of these matters and other related ones such as restrictions on SDI spending, on individual weapons systems, or on the overall military budget, has a good deal of authoritative support outside the government at this time.⁴ The approach which has traditionally been most effective is to pick out one or two of these at a time as priorities for lobbying, with some hope of overcoming expected resistance. The problem is that a long, drawn-out, piecemeal approach is unlikely to have much effect on the proliferation process that is now close at hand.

To be effective, we need a dramatic and comprehensive package of coordinated changes in policies and programs among current nuclear states, expressing a fundamental change in our relation to nuclear weapons. Designing such a package requires informed discussion and analysis, agreement on priorities, and assignment of tasks and schedules. It will take a focused effort of the highest urgency.

Unravelling the Legacy of the Manhattan Project

The main precedent for that kind of effort in the United States is the very one which launched the nuclear era: the Manhattan Project. The events of the latter half of 1991 have created new conditions that make 1992, the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the Manhattan

current leaders to disable as many Russian strategic missiles as they will agree to. The Americans should offer reciprocal cuts, and give financial and technical aid to carry out disabling and dismantling as fast as is physically possible.

Manhattan Project II: Specific Aims and a Timetable

The original project of 1942 (after an earlier gestation period of three years) designed and delivered a bomb in three more years. The following proposed schedule of successive targets—with one-year, three-year and end-of-decade deadlines—exemplifies the kind of planning and recommendations the new project might produce for action by the next administration or, if necessary, by Congress through the budgetary process.

By Mid-1993: Within an initial target date of one year from now—a shorter deadline than would have seemed at all plausible before the latest U.S.-Commonwealth initiatives—the U.S. government should:

- Join the Commonwealth of Independent States in adopting the principle of no-first-use of nuclear weapons; reject in principle and practice the use of nuclear weapons as an instrument of policy or warfare, restricting remaining devices—in minimal numbers, separated physically and organizationally from regular military commands and forces—to the single function of deterring nuclear attack;
- End nuclear testing: join the Commonwealth in a moratorium on nuclear testing and negotiate a permanent Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, as provided in the preamble of the Partial Test Ban Treaty and “recalled” in the preamble of the Non-Proliferation Treaty;
- Commit itself to disable and dismantle—not merely withdraw from deployment—all tactical nuclear weapons, air-launched as well as sea- and land-based;
- Commit itself not to produce fissionable materials for weapons, or to reuse material from dismantled warheads in new weapons, seeking comparable commitment from other nuclear states;
- Suspend indefinitely the production of new nuclear warheads, while seeking a permanent, inspected international ban on production of warheads and of weapons-usable fissionable materials;
- Commit itself to adhere to the provisions of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, narrowly interpreted; and

ment of current stockpiles, is an appropriate goal to be achieved by the end of this century. Radical, decisive transformations of the *status quo* can start this year. They are both essential and attainable in averting proliferation and in reducing to near-zero the risk of nuclear explosions.

It is too early to take abolition as an immediate goal, one that defines the project and measures its worth and success. But it is not too early to be addressing the question seriously. From the outset, the long-run tasks of the project must include an effort to explore the conditions that could *make* a world of zero nuclear weapons feasible.

Almost surely these requirements would include radical transformations of the international environment, in terms of increased trust, cooperation, acceptable surveillance, limitations on the claims of national sovereignty, and the effective disappearance of war and preparation for war as a legitimate and expected activity of states. That is not a way of saying that abolition should be ruled out “for the foreseeable future,” or put off for many generations. It may well be that there will be no truly long-run human future without it, and that therefore a way must be found to make the required transformations ultimately practical. Indeed, it seems more naive than realistic to believe that cities can coexist indefinitely with wars and nuclear weapons. However, long before consensus on the conditions for total abolition is likely, other goals of the utmost importance are clearly attainable. These must be the main focus of this project.

Current American Policy: Encouraging Proliferation

The need for the effective denuclearization of the world should give a sense of urgency to a new Manhattan Project as great as that which inspired the original one fifty years ago. Then, the time pressure came from the prospect of a German bomb. Now it reflects both a window of opportunity and the prospect of bombs in a host of new countries or in the hands of terrorist groups.

Even before the breakup of the Soviet Union, nations were on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons. U.N. inspections revealed that covert traffic in technology had brought Iraq much closer to a bomb than had been realized. This had earlier proved true in Israel, India and Pakistan. It is speculated that the same might be the case in North Korea, Iran, Algeria and other states. Indeed, the U.N. uncovered in Iraq an effort of a scale, determination, and even technique (using multiple approaches in parallel) emulating closely the earlier

weapons by creating incentives for proliferation or making it seem legitimate.

U.S. nuclear planning has rested on two specific premises which the American government must reverse if it is to help end the era of nuclear threats. First it must accept that if there is one legitimate function of nuclear weapons it is only to deter nuclear attacks. Second, the American government must adopt the corollary constraint of "no-first-use" of nuclear weapons, renouncing the willingness and readiness to *initiate* nuclear warfare under any circumstances. The latter principle was adopted as a commitment by the 11 republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States in their founding document in December, 1991.

Few Americans are aware of the extent to which the U.S./NATO first-use doctrine has isolated the United States and its Western allies from world opinion. Neither are Americans familiar with the sharpness of the language used by U.N. majorities in resolutions condemning the policies on which NATO has based its planning. U.N. Resolution 36100, the Declaration on the Prevention of Nuclear Catastrophe, adopted on December 9, 1981, declares in its preamble: "Any doctrine allowing the first use of nuclear weapons and any actions pushing the world toward a catastrophe are incompatible with human moral standards and the lofty ideals of the U.N."

With an era of widespread proliferation looming, it should be unmistakably clear that accepting this resolution as a universal principle would be in the best interests of the United States. The United States would join, at last, in a moral judgment that is already asserted by the majority of governments of the world. This would have to be expressed by more than a changed vote in the U.N. It would have to be demonstrated in massive changes in force posture, doctrine, readiness, and underlying public attitudes. It is late in the day for an American national change of heart to be wholly impressive to others. But we must plan and act as if it were not too late. It is hard to exaggerate the difference that a real change in the direction of American influence might possibly make in the world.

The restriction of nuclear functions to deterrence of nuclear attack, especially when reinforced by the renunciation of intent to threaten or carry out nuclear "first use" attacks initiating nuclear warfare, implies a force posture that seems to correspond to a "principle of minimum defense sufficiency" promoted by President Yeltsin. But no government has yet suggested, let alone committed itself to unilat-

Despite their present, admirable posture of nuclear renunciation, the republics of the former Soviet Union should not be regarded as indefinitely immune to such temptation⁵. On the very day President Bush announced his unilateral initiatives on tactical weapons and SAC alert last September, a leading civilian strategic analyst in Moscow was warning that because of budget constraints and mounting insecurities, there was likely to be "a resuscitation of nuclear weapons" in the posture and policy thinking of the states of the former Soviet Union, including Russia.⁶

He was conveying the very reasoning that led President Eisenhower to adopt his "New Look" policy for defense budgets and strategy in 1953. Eisenhower placed primary reliance on first-use threats of nuclear weapons, which offered "more bang for the buck" than conventional forces. It is not reassuring that the same Russian analyst pointed out that this projected policy was "just what NATO had done, after all."

The NATO doctrine that nuclear weapons were legitimate, cheap and effective substitutes for conventional forces led, over 30 years, to the seeding of Western and Eastern Europe with tens of thousands of Hiroshima-size tactical weapons and to their backup by 25,000 megaton-range strategic weapons, mostly on hair-trigger alert. This Russian analyst was forecasting a replay in his own country of what was arguably the most irresponsible and dangerous policy choice ever made.

In fact, policy within Russia and the other nuclear republics took a decisively different direction, moving toward the rapid rollback of this 30-year buildup. But that spectacular shift is not irreversible, as President Yeltsin took pains to emphasize on his visit to New York and Camp David in early February. The latent lure of the Eisenhower New Look may persist for the Russian military.⁷ This underlines the urgency of consolidating the new Commonwealth course as rapidly as possible. And it means, above all, challenging and transcending the old way of thinking in official Washington.

As of February 1992, the United States and Russia propose to keep sizeable numbers of tactical nuclear weapons. Virtually all of these weapons are vulnerable to nuclear attack, especially when they are deployed close enough to a combat front to be used at all. Thus, they are weapons only for first-use or for use against non-nuclear opponents. Recent proposals would store most of these weapons, rather than dismantling them. These proposals are welcome for